

News Framing of the Arab Spring Conflict from the Lens of Newspaper Editorials

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Abstract

News framing of events often restricts us to either ‘oppose’ or ‘favour’ a particular side/party involved in a conflict. This paper examines the print media framing of the Arab Spring in the editorials of *The News International* (NI) of Pakistan and *Arab News* (AN) of Saudi Arabia. The coverage sample consists of newspaper editorials published from January 2011 to December 2012 when the uprising received phenomenal attention from the media worldwide. Qualitative content analysis of 48 newspaper editorials (24 NI/24 AN), demonstrates how senior media workers constructed the Arab Spring as an international conflict. Specifically, the lexical choices of editorial writers reveal that mainstream newspapers in both the countries positively framed the pro-Arab Spring protesters (public), who reportedly desired to bring the ‘change’. On the contrary, the media framing of the uprising also reflects that the newspapers negatively framed the anti-Arab Spring authorities (ruling elite), who reportedly resisted the ‘change’. A future research is recommended to investigate readers’ perspectives, as well, on the media portrayals of the Arab Spring or other similar conflicts which can give insights into how language use can impact and is impacted by ideology, cultural nuances and identity of diverse individuals.

Keywords: Arab Spring conflict, lexical choices, news framing, newspaper editorials, protesters and authorities

1. Introduction

In this paper, we examine the print media framing of the Arab Spring in the editorials of *The News international* (NI) of Pakistan and *Arab News* (AN) Saudi Arabia. Mostly, previous media studies about the Arab Spring demonstrate how the events were framed in news articles of different newspapers (e.g., see Golan, 2013; Ha & Shin, 2016; Haigh & Bruce, 2017) and very little (e.g., Ha, 2013) has been investigated the way editorial writers portrayed the events. Hopefully, this paper will offer useful insights into the editorial lens of the two mainstream newspapers. Based on their religious and cultural proximities, the mainstream media in both the countries seriously covered the Arab Spring, which first broke out in Tunisia in the aftermath of the act of self-immolation committed by a vegetable seller, who faced harassment by municipality officials. This act catalysed revolt in the country against the authorities. Consequently, enraged protesters toppled the regime in the country (Roberts, 2016). Reportedly, the Arab Spring contagiously spread to other countries where the public took to streets to express their discontentment with ruling authorities and overthrew the regimes in Yemen, Egypt and Libya (Cole, 2014). In Syria, President Bashar Assad failed to appease the agitated masses and tried to control demonstrations which demanded 48-year-old state of emergency in the country. Nevertheless, the regime failed to halt anti-government demonstrations and the uprising transformed into a civil war (Botelho, 2015). Media groups triggered a global debate by framing the Arab Spring. On certain occasions, the media capably formatted a political context other than acting as a source of simply informing audiences. The media have been held responsible for escalating unrest and by giving different explanation of the uprising (Karyotakis, Panagiotou, Antonopoulos, & Kiourexidou, 2017).

In this paper, we highlight the framing of the Arab Spring protesters and the authorities (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Syria) based on van Dijk’s (1998a, 1998b) model of ideological square. This model focuses on four

evaluative principles: (i) emphasize our good properties/actions; (ii) emphasize their bad properties/actions; (iii) mitigate our bad properties/actions; and (iv) mitigate their good properties/actions, which emphasize good/positive acts of allied groups and bad/negative acts of opposite groups and deemphasize bad/negative acts of allied groups and good/positive acts of opposite groups. This model provides insights into different types of actor descriptions in the media accounts of conflicts and depends on ideological opinions of journalists, their assumed beliefs, presumptions, values and judgments about others. Such journalistic beliefs contribute to the discourse of editorials and are produced through discourse structures such as lexical choices, propositions, implications, presuppositions, descriptions and polarization (van Dijk, 1995a, 1998b). As a framing device, lexical choices and labels are employed to designate certain categories in syntactic structures and reveal ‘cognitive categorizations’ made by newsmakers (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). For portraying events and actors involving two sides, lexical choices are hardly used in a neutral way. Instead, they are exploited as important tools to conceal newspaper opinions (van Dijk, 1988b, 2000).

Our findings reveal that the media representations of the uprising put forward by each newspaper backed the Arab Spring protesters’ demand for a ‘change’ and hardly approved the decade-old regimes in affected countries. It begins with a brief description of the notion of news construction and introducing editorials. Following this, we introduce framing theories and represent media framing of international conflicts. We, then, briefly discuss the methodology and present the findings.

2. News

News is a major language genre in the media. It frames stories of our day, covers the pages of newspapers and fills out the hours of times on radio and television. News output is the primary product of news organisations. It is determined by values that are reflected in a language used to tell the news. Both the media organisation and audiences consider news as the focus of the media content (Bell, 1991). Also, news is defined as the construction of meaning and content of particular communicative events. Yet, not much is known as to how a particular real-life event occurs given that readers are exposed to its framing in the form of news. Often, people become more interested in the narration rather than with the construction of news events. We argue that the construction of such events can be explored by examining various strategies and ideologies which are involved in the production of news and the way social contexts are reproduced by newsmen (van Dijk, 1988b). News reflects social, economic, and ideological values in a way discourse is produced in a particular society through the media with special attention given to social and political elites, elite organisations, and elite countries. The making of news involves interactions among journalists, social members, professional routines of newsrooms, institutional or organisational environment and socially shared ideologies and news values. The media news in particular can be perceived as a type of news information representing persons or events, and a news text or discourse, which represents recently occurring events made public through the news media. The construction of news also involves basic operation including selection, summarization, local semantics and stylistics (van Dijk, 1988b). News may also be understood as an everyday interpretation of events, considered potentially newsworthy material by newsmen, processed by news organisations, (Tuchman, 1997). Moreover, news is not simply a “value-free reflection” of realities and for this reason there exists a strong tendency of bias in the media descriptions of events (Fowler, 1991, p. 4).

3. Editorials

An editorial, typically, has a fixed position, header and a distinguished page layout in a newspaper with a restricted length of 200–500 words (van Dijk, 1992). Editorials are a written copy of newspaper opinion (Biber, 1991). As official representatives of newspapers, editorials deal with a single event or issue at a time, supposedly, free of any elements of objectivity and indicate socio-political importance that a newspaper gives to an event (van Dijk, 1989). Thus, their primary objective is to deliver official standpoints of a newspaper, (re)shape public opinion, set political agenda, influence social debates and readers’ decision making (van Dijk, 1995a). They are also constructive in building socio-cultural harmony within a society and among various group members by strengthening their ideological interests (van Dijk, 1998a, 1998b). Editorials claim to speak “their own point of view”, which distinguishes them from other newspaper items like new reporting and feature writings and have different labels, for instance, opinion, comment and leading article (Fowler, 1991, p. 208). Yet, editorial provide space to newspapers for (re)establishing their ideologies, speaking with readers and representing newspaper perception of reality. They go to several processes like selection, assimilation, rewriting and transformation. Hence, ideologically and linguistically, editorial happen to be complex and revealing genres of the media discourse (Hodge & Kress, 1979). By identifying such crucial roles of editorials, much can be gained from the language used in fanning conflicts.

4. Framing Theories

Framing is a “media effect” which describes the way public is influenced by news angles created by journalists. An angle can be understood as an ideological and interpretive framework which enables journalists to report an issue or simply the way media report about certain matters, groups, persons or institutions having positive or negative attributes (Fourie, 2001). News framing organises everyday reality which is an important characteristic of news and news workers, for instance, editors are part of a system of social norms and attitudes that determines which matters are interesting and how matters should be covered as news (Tuchman, 1978). Also, to frame means to select certain aspects of perceived reality and make that more prominent; thus specifically, to frame means to promote a problem definition, provide causal interpretation, and suggest moral evaluation or recommendations (Entman, 1993). Or, framing means to select or highlight certain features of events or issues and make connections among them to propagate a specific interpretation, evaluation or solution (Entman, 2003). A frame has also been regarded as essentially “centralising idea” to make sense of relevant events describing an issue and it indirectly suggest ways about how to deal with an issue (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Yet, frames are conceptual structures which represent specific areas of knowledge and experience (Hart, 2018).

Framing theory acts as a ‘theoretical tool’ to demonstrate how journalists and news organisation (de) emphasise certain parts of reality. It refers to the principal of organising idea for the news content and to inform audiences about representation of various issues. Hence, certain frames become crucial for journalists for several reasons such as to understand the complex word and then reproduce it into news stories in a manner which is intelligible to their audiences. Framing is utilised as a “potent technique” for pressurising both individuals and society to change media the representations (Ha & Shin, 2016). Goffman (1974) defined frames as organisational principles “which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them” (21). These frames are employed by journalists for organising “strips of the everyday world, a strip being an arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of on-going activity” (10–11). Goffman further elaborated these frames as schemata of interpretation allowing people “to locate, perceive, identify and label” (21) various events which take place around them. Framing serves as a means to unfold the power invested in a particular type of communication directing individual cognitions to a give interpretation of a situation (Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber, & Fan, 1998). It also brings into the limelight certain elements fundamental to determine individual judgements or their power of making interferences (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Frames enable journalists to deal with larger chunks of information in a fast way and routinely deliver it to audiences for effective communication. Further, media frames are “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). News framing is subject to ideological perceptions or one-sidedness demonstrated by news/media organisation (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). Newspapers are cultural artefacts representing the culture of a particular society, events through the language of cultural and emotional loading (Reah, 2002) and words of power-holders (Fairclough, 2013). Such language acts enhance readers’ socio-political awareness by constructing a variety of news (van Dijk, 1991; Fowler, 1991). Newspapers share their institutional and ideological inclinations through editorials (Mureşan, 2013) which are hardly subjective in their content worth exploring for several insights (Lee & Lin, 2006). Editorials frame conflicts according to editors’ point of views (Pennock, 2000) and opinions considered crucial by publishers, editorial board members and newspaper executives (Hallock, 2007). Being impersonal, editorials are guiding principles for readers to (re)shape their decision making on critical matters (van Dijk, 1995a). Nevertheless, editorial narrations tend to be bias since more often, than not, news is constructed with a particular ideological angle (Fowler, 1991). Therefore, news discourse needs to be critically analysed to understand how language choices construct particular meanings in a given context. This analysis proves that each type of discourse is aligned to a particular use of language contextually differing by all means (Fulton, 2005). Moreover, newspapers have been found to be a good choice of medium for framing analysis (Linström & Marais, 2012).

5. Media Framing of Conflicts

Media discourse is powerful because it controls readers’ mind, reshapes their knowledge and beliefs. It is intentionally produced by controlling the means of mass communication. Its power can be realized through strategies used in producing the media content (van Dijk, 1995b). Media advocate agenda of their sponsors by controlling media policies (Chomsky & Hermon, 2010) and produce texts through institutional routines such as collecting, selecting, editing (Fairclough, 1995). This helps to examine the relationship between media messages and their sociocultural contexts (van Dijk, 1991). Media frame events in slanted ways, for instance, through content bias to promote a particular interest, support the interests of power seekers and disregard opponents, convince people and accept media construal of certain actors and one-sided portrayals. Such an influential bias

reshapes the audiences' mind as desired by the media organisations. Similarly, by relying on decision-making bias type, the editors in major media organisations promote ideologies to hypnotise readers' decisions making. So, journalistic belief-system rules media discourses and promulgate ideologies by means of slanted frames to sponsor their favourite actors. Equally, biased frames demonstrate power of texts and make certain parts appear more striking and intelligible than others (Entman, 2010).

News framing of international issues involves certain complications because framing of foreign news is determined by several factors media routines, journalist values, gatekeeping, organisational pressure and logic than independent values or judgments of editors, sources used by news organisation and closeness with the nations covered. In order to determine domestic implications of foreign issues, the news coverage possibly reflects each state's interests and 'cultural stereotypes'. The media scholars have pointed out that frames are designed by a variety of influences stemming from socio-political ideologies of a given society to values and backgrounds held by journalists—who are dependent on news frames not just to organise social world but may also disregard certain aspects of reality (Ha & Shin, 2016). In fact, to enhance several interpretations of meaning, newspaper editors utilise particular linguistic structures such as rhetoric, metaphors and others. For manoeuvring such strategies, the news media is vested with the power to alter public discourse and (re) shape their public perception of certain groups (Cabaniss & Cameron, 2017).

Media framing of the Arab Spring, in some of the previous studies, has revealed a variety of insights. To cite, the uprising portrayals by the US newspapers (*The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*) indicated that opinion journalism in the country was largely influenced by the interests of journalists, ex-government officials, scholars in media organisations and social institutions and American ideologies. The framing also reflected views of political elites and emphasised possible impact of the uprising on the U.S.'s deterrence of radical Islam and terrorism (Ha, 2017). Newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian uprising revealed several frames. For instance, *Al Jazeera English* used frames related to Egyptian history, political strategies, public engagement, public opinion, economy and conflict frame (nonviolent) more frequently than the *CNN*, which used conflict frame (violence) (Haigh & Bruce, 2017). Other newspapers, *The Telegraph* (British) and *The Washington Post* (American), inclined to peace reporting frames than protest paradigm and positively represented the protesters than the regime's military while *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Masry Al-Youm* (Egyptian) relied more on framing protesters' act of violence and reporting (Youssef, 2012). Similarly, Hamdy and Gomaa (2012) found that pro-governments newspapers (*Al-Ahram*, *Al-Akhbar*, *Al-Messa*, *Al-Jomhoriya*) in Egypt portrayed the uprising as anti-government conspiracy and declared the protesters' acts destructive and social media posts used humane frame to declare the protests as a movement to achieve social justice. However, independent newspapers (*Al-Shorouk*, *Al-Youm-Al-Sabee*) used a mixture of these frames.

Another study, by Golan (2013), on the analysis of American newspapers, *International Herald Tribune* and *Wall Street Journal*, which framed the 2011 Egyptian revolution, put forth that the framing was influenced by the identity of op-ed contributors, sources they utilised and frames they selected. Ideological framing may obstruct objective representations of events. Ha and Shin (2016) claimed that South Korean conservative papers (*The Chosun Daily* and *The Joongang Daily*) emphasised the likely influence of the Arab Spring on democratic movements in North Korea and China while liberal papers (*The Hankyoreh Daily* and *The Kyunghyang Daily*) framed that the uprising was instigated by economic insecurity, poverty, unemployment, and so on.

6. Research Objectives

This paper aims to:

- 1) investigate the framing of the Arab Spring by the editorial writers of the *Arab News* and *The News International*;
- 2) examine the strategies used by the editorial writers to frame the protesters and authorities;
- 3) explore the similarities and differences in the newspapers framing of the conflict.

7. Research Questions

This paper answers the following questions:

- 1) How did the *Arab News* (AN; Arab) and *The News International* (NI; non-Arab) editorial writers frame the Arab Spring?
- 2) What strategies were employed by the editorial writers to frame the protesters and authorities?
- 3) Did the two newspapers frame the uprising in a similar manner?

8. Methodology

This paper uses qualitative methodology which is more flexible and exhaustive in exploring cultural artefacts, like newspaper articles and hidden assumptions which remain opaque to quantitative content analysis (Gitlin, 1980). In this regard, several steps are used including selecting a medium (newspapers), determining a specific time-frame for analysis, drawing a sample, identifying unit of analysis and the news frame such as 'how' and 'what' (Linström & Marais, 2012). The 'how' refers to constantly comparing units/themes/categories/frames, elaborating and refining categories, finding relationship between themes/categories and simplifying the data (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). The 'what', as argued by Linström and Marais, is guided by the research problem that needs investigation.

The data consist of Arab Spring editorials published in the NI and AN during the January 2011 and December 2012 period when the media around the globe were highly engaged in covering the protests. Briefly, the NI is a mainstream English language newspaper which originates from Pakistan and has an estimated circulation of 140,000 copies per day. The NI was selected to explore how the Arab Spring was framed outside the Arab world in a Muslim majority country. The AN that, supposedly, represents an Arab-community's perspective on the conflict is also a mainstream English language newspaper originating from Saudi Arabia. Its circulation is estimated at 110,000 copies per day (Afzal, 2017). The editorials were extracted from the newspapers after multiple readings with a focus on keywords like Arab Spring, uprisings, revolutions, unrest, protests, protesters and so on. Such keywords denoted 'salient aspects' of a document (Mahata, Shah, Kuriakose, Zimmermann, & Talburt, 2018). This scrutiny yielded 48 newspaper editorials as a unit of analysis.

The sampled editorials were investigated, through qualitative analysis of media content, based on van Dijk's (1998a, 1998b) concept of ideological square suitable for analysing actor descriptions (protesters vs. authorities) by NI and AN. Our goal was to examine how the senior media workers and professionals labelled the protesters and the authorities. The data were closely read (Wall, Stahl, & Salam, 2015) to make sense of the editorial constructions. Each newspaper editorial was examined to obtain a clear idea about newspaper representations and was coded for the following categories: (i) emphasize our good properties/actions; (ii) emphasize their bad properties/actions; (iii) mitigate our bad properties/actions; and (iv) mitigate their good properties/actions. For a better manageability, NVivo was utilized to code meaningful data segments (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

9. Findings

The editorial writers of the NI and AN framed the 'pro-Arab Spring' and 'anti-regime' protesters (public), and 'anti-change' and 'anti-Arab Spring' authorities (ruling elite) in a dichotomous way through different lexical choices (see Tables 1 and 2).

9.1 Framing of the Protesters

Table 1 demonstrates that the lexical choices of NI editorial writers framed the protesters under the evaluative move of 'emphasizing our good actions', analysed in 15 editorials (sources) and 25 comments (references), and 'mitigating our bad actions' (12 sources and 19 comments). For instance, the protesters' revolt for change was framed as the *direction of democracy*, whilst Tunisians' unity against the regimes was described through the lexical choice under the *banner of one cause*, and that the nation arranged *credible* election soon after the old regime collapsed. Similarly, the protesters in Egypt were described as *peaceful* in demanding 'change' throughout the Arab Spring for the sake of their *democratic* future. The lexical choice, *coordinating closely*, depicted that the Libyan protesters collaborated with the NATO forces against the regime as they were approaching success by holding the country *in their own hands*. Likewise, the editorial choice of words, frequent and appalling, represented the protesters' massacres in Syria which turned into a *bleed and burn* state. Further, Syrians' action of protesting against the regime was framed as their *legitimate* concerns which must be addressed by the UN as well.

The analysis of the NI editorial also revealed that anti-regime actions of the Arab Spring protesters were de-emphasised to a great extent (e.g., see Table 1). For instance, the lexical choice, *desire for change*, framed the revolts of the Arab Spring suggesting that there was a need to bring change and replace ruling authorities of the country. Tunisians' actions of throwing the old regime were represented through *painful transitions* upon the uprising. Other lexical choices which mitigated protesters' actions included protesting against the permanent *state of emergency* imposed on Egyptians who were described as young *liberal moderates* planning to demand a 'change'. It was also mitigated that the Libyans launched the Arab Spring as they suffered for too long and were *killed by warplanes*. The NI claimed that due to *extreme homicide*, the protesters in Syria received international condemnation. It was also framed that the protesters were trying to regain their sociocultural and political *identities* through the Arab Spring (see Table 1 for more examples).

Table 1. Lexical choices framing the Arab Spring protesters

<i>The News International</i>		<i>Arab News</i>	
Emphasizing our good actions	Mitigating our bad actions	Emphasizing our good actions	Mitigating our bad actions
revolution in process	poverty	momentum lies	butchered
unity of purpose	last thirty years	winds of change	totally abandoned
popular revolt	killed by warplanes	new Arab world	defenceless
transition period	bleed and burn	rapid change	peaceful
blessing of protesters	bloodshed	moral advance	tumultuous Eid
generic flag	mass killings	notion of democracy	victims of regime
coordinating closely	identities	euphoria	unemployment
a template to recover	desire for change	tsunami of change	save Libyans
their own mastery	manage to overthrow	people's verdict	demand of many
national flag	they see as freedom	political consensus	revolution
banner of one cause	liberal moderates	massive marches	under attack
post-colonial shakeout	appalling massacre	chances of victory	need protection
direction of democracy	dismembered	desperate for change	short of arms
biggest achievement	threw off shackles	courageous	faster reforms
credible transition	forbidden to gather	won a real say	self-immolation
siding with protesters	suppressed	choice of majority	primary target
in their own hands	democratic rights	comfort	speedy justice
celebration	suffered too long	Islam to be fully	executed
determined	divided	political process	their own affairs
	painful transitions	their own destiny historic mandate	women, children
	extreme homicide	brothers and sisters	innocent lives
			for half a century

The AN, as indicated in Table 1, also framed the protesters under the evaluative move 'emphasizing our good actions', examined in 14 sources and 22 references, and 'mitigating our bad actions' examined in 9 sources and 14 references. For instance, the lexical choice a *tsunami of change* framed achievements of the protesters in Tunisia and their act of instigating the Arab Spring. It was also claimed that the protesters in Yemen, who demanded authorities' removal faced repression but remained *courageous* to hold mass protests. Similarly, in Egypt, the protesters were represented through the comments, such as, despite remaining unharmed and *peaceful* they faced deadly force. The lexical choices like masters of *their own destiny* and *euphoric* framed protesters' action in Libya—fully determined to eliminate old authorities. The Arab Spring in Syria was also portrayed deadly as cited in the lexical choices *onto to streets*, *bloody butchery* and *tumultuous* Eid. It was also claimed that Syrians drew *comfort* from the protesters' success in other countries.

The AN editorials also de-emphasised anti-regime actions of the protesters against the Arab Spring authorities. For instance, the comment control of *their own affairs* suggested that the protesters rightly forced the regimes to resign. In Egypt, their action of regrouping was mitigated as their demand for *speedy justice*, *speedy trial* and *faster reforms*. Further editorial comments such as *people's verdict*, *the choice of majority* suggested that innocent protesters were overjoyed at the outcome of elections. Their actions in Libya were also deemphasised as *unarmed civilian* who sacrificed lives, faced brutal treatment, ran *short of ammunition* and needed protection through interventions by Arab and Muslims nations and the West. The protesters in Syria were also portrayed as *defenceless civilian* and *victims of regime* who were not spared even in the holy month of Ramadan with deaths in hundreds. Their call for nationwide marches was deemphasised through the comment that *they wanted to judge regime's* assurance in applying peace agreements (see Table 1 for more examples).

9.2 Framing of the Authorities

As illustrated in Table 2, the lexical choices of the NI editorial writers framed the Arab Spring authorities under the evaluative moves, 'emphasize their bad actions, analysed in 17 sources and 37 references, and 'mitigate their good actions' examined in 19 sources and 31 references (e.g., see Table 1). For instance, the Arab Spring authorities were categorized under lexical choices such as *old regimes and dynasties* that were defeated by the protesters. The labels *autocratic government* and *one-party state* were used for the Tunisian government that was accused for controlling people through *dreadful repressions*. The Egyptian authorities were charged for corruption, keeping people in *shackles* and causing anti-regime marches and declared as the unpopular government that led to *dynastic politics*, *dictatorship* and *decades of repression*. Similarly, the Libyan leader was blamed for *his eccentricity* and his 40 year-ruling was portrayed as a *single authority* for all practical purposes,

desperate regime committed to killing and so on. His death was framed through the lexical choices as a form of celebration and *dramatic* development. Meanwhile, actions of the Syrian authorities were labelled as the *brutal crackdown* and forces loyal to President Assad. He was framed as a *recalcitrant ruler* who rejected to end the *bloody repression* and conducted the bloody attacks on the Syrian protesters.

The editorial opinions of the NI also deemphasised retaliatory actions of the Arab Spring authorities. For instance, the Egyptian authorities were framed through the editorial choices *the old school* and *principal architect* of cruel security and police apparatus acting against their countrymen. The Egyptian President was blamed for holding *one-party* dictatorship and not allowing his people to choose candidates of their choice. Similarly, Qaddafi's actions against the Libyan protesters were also deemphasised through judgements such as *clinging to power*, *Libyan demagogue*; he was blamed for firmly staying in authority as implied in the comment *quasi-socialism*. It was declared that Qaddafi threatened Libyans and targeted all those who rejected his *fancies*. In a similar style, the NI deemphasized Assad's actions against the protesters in Syria by framing him as highly determined to *slaughter* his own people. His regime was also accused for demonstrating a true image of *massacres*, which deliberately hindered the observers' mission of monitoring the killings. The lexical choices such as *holds on grimly* suggested that the paper deemphasised the Syrian authorities' stay in power (see Table 2 for more examples).

Table 2. Lexical choices framing the Arab Spring authorities.

<i>The News International</i>		<i>Arab News</i>	
Emphasizing their bad actions	Mitigating their good actions	Emphasizing their bad actions	Mitigating their good actions
political turbulence	helicopter gunships	savagery	enfant terrible
autocratic government	quasi-socialism	crackdown	mercenaries
one-party	clinging to power	attacks by armed	totally delusional
old regimes and dynasties	powerful	his police state	dwindling band
dynastic politics	recalcitrant Assad	corruption	prison walls
attempts to contain	may not remain	people's blood	plain clothes police
his future may not	one man	deadly and bloody	snake-like
no other power	holds on grimly	barbaric regime	cynical powers
last 40 years	despised leader	frighten people	assaults by forces
brutal and ruthless	unpopular	rule for ever	regime has loyalists
state of emergency	nominally leader	abuse of power	political visionary
his eccentricity	less and less likely	brutal repression	refusing to leave
committed to kill	regime forces	violent killings	ridiculously named
repressive regime	the Assad regime	acted as a tyrant	resolute defence
deluded dictator	pro-Assad militia	killing machine	reputation...dragged
tyranny	government forces	carnage, butchery	thick-skinned
bloody repression	a lone supporter	murderous regime	Assad's intentions
bloodiest attacks	the old school Libyan	blood-thirsty	old cynical game
summer of blood	demagogue principal architect	condemnation	their grisly work paramilitary
brutal crackdown		license to kill	thugs
		reign of terror	

The lexical choices of the AN editorial writers (as shown in Table 2) also labelled the Arab Spring authorities under the evaluative moves 'emphasizing their bad actions' which was found in 20 sources and 45 references and 'mitigating their good actions' which was examined in 11 sources and 28 references. The lexical choice *old cynical game* framed the governments in Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, Libya and Syria. The expected exit of authorities in Tunisia was represented through the comment *days...clearly numbered*. Their regime was described as a *police state* which suppressed other parties. In Yemen, 33-year-old ruling authorities were also accused of inevitable bloodshed and instability. Similarly, the lexical choices *corruption*, *abuse of power* and *deadly force* framed the authorities in Egypt blamed for practising repressive tactics, crushing rebellions, keeping *lid on popular discontent* and using divide and rule strategies for maintaining police state. The editorial choices like *enfant terrible* of the region and *political visionary* mitigated the authorities in Libya. President Qaddafi's assertions were declared as *delusional boasts*; his death was depicted as an end of Libyans' *nightmare*; and end of his party was portrayed as a *garbage heap of history*. Likewise, the comments *thick-skinned*, *callous clique* represented the Syrian President. He was blamed for deceiving the peace-keeping monitors by giving his own version of the homicides, *exploiting* disunity among opposition groups and using unrestrained violence.

Some more lexical choices like *snake-like*, *barbaric acts*, *bloody* and *barbaric regime* framed actions of the authorities in Syria.

Also, the AN deemphasised all revengeful actions of the Arab Spring authorities. It was claimed that supporters, *plain clothes police*, of Egyptian authorities attacked the protesters. The editorials also used lexis like *mercenaries* to mitigate actions of the Libyan authorities against protesters and declared that Qaddafi launched too *horrific* and *terrifying* crackdown on the protesters. He was characterised as a weird personality, *totally delusional*, absolutely committed power abuse. The paper also deemphasized anti-change actions of the Syrian authorities, for instance, they frequently unleashed a *reign of terror* on his people. The lexical selection, *killing machine*, portrayed that the authorities remained intolerable to the Syrians' demands. The international friendship of the Syria authorities was also deemphasized, through the comments such as *cynical*, *dwindling band* of friends which enabled President Assad to slaughter his people (see Table 2 for more examples).

10. Discussion

10.1 Editorial Charges and Endorsements

Media are acknowledged by politicians and societal actors because of their presumed influence on public and their significance as a source of information which is beyond simple reporting (Lichtenstein, Esau, Pavlova, Osipov, & Argylov, 2019). This study unravels that NI and AN, overall, positively framed pro-Arab Spring protestors and negatively framed the authorities. The newspapers, irrelevant of their geographical proximities and their Arab (AN – Saudi Arabia) and non-Arab (NI – Pakistan) background, unanimously adopted a 'pro-protester' stance by framing the events based on their ideological and national interests. Hence, a similarity in the newspapers' perspectives on the crises that helps to explain the Arab Spring framing, internationally, and provide insights into the conflicts from outside the borders of the uprising countries. Such findings confirm the presence of gatekeeping mechanism in framing news events (Ha, 2013) that enables editors to decide about presenting a particular view of the world (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). These arguments concur with our findings that the media information is filtered before it gets disseminated publically. The Arab Spring editorials have demonstrated competence and knowledge to (de) emphasize or (de) legitimize certain aspect of the events to support the 'change'. It has been revealed that the 'voice' of the anti-Arab Spring authorities remained unheard. Instead, they were harshly criticised for ruling unjustly and failing to satisfy the public. This pattern of coverage is consistent with the finding that such writing practices are embedded to exercise editorial influence and power over public issues, demonstrate journalistic choices of framing a particular event and newsroom imperatives (Ha, 2013).

In framing events, editors decide what is significant for their audiences and what matters for them (Ha & Shin, 2016). The NI and AN unanimously disseminated the discursive strategy of showing discontentment with the authorities and accusing them for resisting 'change' and defying protesters' demands. For instance, some derogatory remarks (*the old school* – NI and *enfant terrible* – AN) indicate that the authorities were contemptuously framed based on judgements of a deviant style through which the newspapers distanced themselves from the authorities and condemn their acts of governing. It may be drawn that the Arab Spring was editorialised under 'controlled framing' and closed scrutiny of media institutions to steer readers' judgment in a directed way. Hence, it is advocated that 'news frames' reflect social and political ideologies which are dominantly shared in a society and journalists represent foreign affairs in a way which aligns with their local audience by emphasising, excluding certain aspects and preferring their own agenda (Ha, 2017). On the contrary, it has been noticed, the Arab Spring protesters were framed through positive evaluative beliefs. Protestors' anti-regime actions were largely deemphasised in favour of the Arab Spring as evident in the editorial comments (*legitimate aspirations* – NI and *masters of their own destiny* – AN). To this confirmation, the news has been found as framing of the world mediated by journalists and its discourse has patterns of what it conveys and its content describes ideologies, values, beliefs which make it distinctive (Qing, 2000).

Media are not simple transmitters of facts rather their professionals are actively engaged in shaping constituents of an event directing public attention to certain issues and determining its importance (Marron, 2019). The Arab Spring editorials served as prominent places for manifestation of newspaper ideologies and intended perspectives of journalists and news media. The presence of such strategies in editorials confirms the presence of news frames (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). The analysis of NI and AN has also disclosed that the authorities were also negatively framed for holding status-quo, remaining 'anti-change' and anti-Arab Spring' as seen through some of the comments: *holds on grimly* – NI and *refusing to leave* – AN. This study exhibits how the media (re) shape public perception, arguably, through the reality they construct in framing groups of people, for instance, protesters vs. authorities. Bolte and Keong (2014) also established that media discourse reflects

distinctive information about various discursive strategies upon which media rely to represent issues. Contrary to the framing of the authorities, the Arab Spring protesters were again positively framed as a ‘spirit of change’ through the lexical choices such as *desire for change* (NI) and *inspiration* (AN). Hence, this type of framing ideologically positioned the public to oppose the authorities and favour the Arab Spring. Ha (2017) also remarked that editorial writings are less constrained by traditional trends of objective journalism and freedom of expression enables newspaper discourse to represent interpretative frameworks within which socio-political events are construed by audience.

Media’s relations to conflicts are best defined based on their role, which is constitutive, and involvement, which is reformatory (Cottle, 2006). This study also demonstrates how senior media workers become voice of their newspapers and exploit their freedom to legitimize certain practices (e.g., protesters’ actions) and disregard others (e.g., authorities’ actions). The newspapers adopted a typical positioning on Arab Spring by means of which journalists play several roles and acquire certain goals by acting as powerful representatives of their societies. Gill, Keong, Bolte and Ramiah (2012) also witnessed that the media do construct certain realities but they also contribute to mostly one-sided standpoints for readers when newspapers interpret facts and details in their own way. As seen, the NI and AN editorials sent a rhetorically positive message by emphasising ‘pro-change’ developments (e.g., *unity of purpose* – NI and *people’s verdict* – AN) and by disapproving ‘anti-change’ behaviour. Such editorial framing has been suggested by Le (2010) as media snapshot of socio-cultural identities where editors play the role of real-life actors. This study witnesses both visible and hidden power of media framing of international conflicts. In our case, ruling governments have been blamed for causing the Arab Spring and failed to fix the chaos. Such findings concur with the notion that predominant framing in the media not only has an effect on crises management but also influences politicians to adopt problem-fixing or contentious strategies (Lichtenstein, Esau, Pavlova, Osipov, & Argylov, 2019). Over all, the newspapers have hardly demonstrate any objectivity in their policy of endorsing the Arab Spring.

11. Conclusion

The paper has demonstrated how media through some motives and strategies frame the events and promote specific newspaper interests that may make the editorial far from any balanced framing of conflicts. Such use of language implies the way the NI and AN editorials framed the Arab Spring to develop the public policy and social awareness in their respective communities (Arab and non-Arab). It directs attention to how the elite and privileged media agents in different nations, of varying culture and societies, construct media discourses reflecting social realities.

Based on the particular features of the editorials and the craftsmanship, such news discourse should be used as a pedagogical tool for English language learners. The construction of news narratives based on real events will expose the learners to language use, its rhetoric, message form, and function. They will then, hopefully, be more aware of how words can be impactful depending on the use and purpose of the particular genre.

Future studies may investigate how events similar to the Arab Spring are framed in different societies to further gain insights into the roles of newspaper editors. The power dynamics and relations held by the media organisation speak volumes about how certain events are reconstructed and depicted. Framing of any particular event is a useful tool or approach to be learned and understood by not only researchers but also those budding scholars who intend to learn more about how it works. Future studies may also examine the readers’ perspectives about how media narratives influence them. Face-to-face interviews or focus group interviews with those who narrate the events can be conducted for richer data, that is, to have a much better understanding of the issue, and language-in-use.

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